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## OUR HOSTAGE AMBASSADOR

# The Man Inside Looks to CIA

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THE NEGOTIATING skills of the diplomat, the wit and the style of the man, the drama of the event. It all comes across clearly in *Our Man Is Inside*, the narrative of the 61 days that U.S. Ambassador Diego Asencio and 14 other diplomats were held hostage by Marxist terrorists in Colombia.



Martinez

The book, authored by Asencio and his wife, Nancy, is a carefully chronicled account of the takeover by M-19 guerrillas of the Dominican Embassy in Bogota during a cocktail party on Feb. 17, 1980, and of the tedious diplomatic efforts to secure the release of the hostages.

*Our Man Is Inside* provides a very detailed description of the diplomats and terrorists involved, of their lives, of their emotions. Asencio kept a shorthand diary of his captivity, and his wife tape-recorded all their telephone conversations.

It is also a quick read, an adventure story whose only flaw is that it has no suspense: Everybody knows that it has a happy ending.

But the first-person account of the 1980 hostage crisis in Colombia (American diplomats were hostage in Iran in this period) is much more.

IT IS an indictment of the 1970s policy of curtailing the capabilities of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to gather information about subversive groups in Latin America.

And it raises questions about possible collusion between the Marxist terrorists who held him hostage and the Soviet-bloc diplomats who walked out of the diplomatic reception only moments before the takeover.

"I noticed the Soviet-bloc envoys start to leave *en masse*," Asencio says in the book. "Taking their cue, I started to inch toward the front door." But before Asencio could walk out, two well-dressed couples entered the Dominican Embassy, pulled their guns, and started shooting at the ceiling. The 61-day ordeal had begun.

In the book, Asencio says that he chafed Commander One — the revolutionary name used by the leader of the M-19 terrorists — about the remarkable timing between the departure of the Soviet-bloc diplomats and the embassy takeover.

"He insisted he would have gotten his hands on the Soviet ambassador," says Asencio. But he also adds that the terrorists could have launched the raid without the knowledge of the Soviet-bloc diplomats.

"Still I have to conclude that their departure so close to the raid can be characterized, at best, as an amazing coincidence," says Asencio, who now is assistant Secretary of State for consular affairs.

EVEN more troubling than the possible collusion between terrorists and diplomats is Asencio's contention that the mid-1970s cutback of CIA funding by Congress had forced the agency to eliminate its capability to observe domestic political currents in Latin America.

"The agency's mission and tactics were attacked in the U.S. press and in Congress," Asencio says in the book. "As a result, the agency cut loose not only many experienced U.S. agents, but more important, its assets abroad that had formerly been used to penetrate, infiltrate, and collect data on the clandestine political world of the Southern Hemisphere.

"An informational gap formed ... and I almost died as a result of it," Asencio says.

He adds that there is no way to protect American diplomats abroad without this intelligence. He says that better security at the embassy and at the private homes of the personnel would only help if diplomats greatly curtail their activities. And, according to Asencio, no diplomat could do a good job with these constraints.

"I understand this gap is now being redressed," Asencio says. "I hope so. The destruction of our intelligence capability in the face of the activities of the KGB and its minions throughout the world strikes me as the height of lunacy. Those who advocate the unilateral dismantling of our intelligence capacity are guilty of incredible naivete."